

Chapter 8

Citizens' Movements - Citizen Responses

The "Pamphlet Wars" and Formation of the Citizens' Network Council for the Emotional Support of Minamata

In October 1971, those who had been re-certified with Minamata disease (the so-called newly certified patients) by the Kumamoto Governor, in line with the judgment of the Director-General of the Environment Agency, commenced direct negotiations with Chisso. Minamata citizens, who had regarded Chisso as the driving force of prosperity for the town, deemed the continued existence or demise of Chisso, a matter of life and death for Minamata City. As the sense of crisis heightened, pamphlets criticizing the behavior of newly certified patients, were distributed by a portion of citizens seeking a swift settlement of the Minamata disease compensation issue. The patients repelled to this, distributing their own pamphlets of protest, in effect initiating the pamphlet wars.

Both the Minamata City Conference for Measures against Pollution and the citizen's volunteer group took action by organizing a signature movement, gathering more than 10,000 signatures, which were then presented to the mayor.

On November 14, both groups consolidated, forming "The Citizens' Network Council for the Emotional Support of Minamata", holding a general meeting where it presented as its goals, an early resolution of the compensation issue; improvement of the environmental pollution victims relief system; reclamation processing of the mercury contaminated sludge; replacement of the term "Minamata disease"; revitalization of the city's economic structure; and lobbying concerned organizations to encourage new enterprises to locate in Minamata.

Newly certified patients and supporters reacted strongly to this movement protesting, "Chisso's liability is not being addressed. The confinement of patients is being schemed".

Formation of the "Minamata Citizens' Movement"

In October 1977, work started on the Minamata Bay Pollution Prevention Project, finally the delivery of a positive development for Minamata City.

At the time, due to a recession throughout the entire industry, Chisso was in an extremely serious state, having fallen into a management crisis, with the emergence of an accumulated deficit.

Given these circumstances, believing the continuation or eradication of the Chisso Minamata factory would have a serious effect on the foundation of the lives of citizens and the development of the local community, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and two economic groups, taking a central role, appealed to local citizens. This developed into a movement of all citizens "To Take Steps in Dealing with Minamata disease, the Revitalization of the Minamata and Ashikita Areas, and the Regeneration of Chisso Minamata".

On December 16, 27 groups including representatives from each faction of the Minamata City Council, Minamata patient groups and labor organizations, as well as political parties, formed "The Citizens' Movement to Take Steps in Dealing with Minamata disease, the Revitalization of the Minamata and Ashikita Areas, and the Regeneration of Chisso Minamata (abbreviated to Minamata Citizens' Movement)".

On December 25, the Minamata Citizens' Movement held a general rally, unanimously deciding on a petition, including clauses demanding the government take steps to provide full relief measures for Minamata Disease sufferers, the restoration of the environment, and the revitalization of the region by establishing special legislation; requesting the government and prefecture exercise special active leadership regarding the payment of compensation to Minamata disease sufferers, the securing of the foundation of the lives of citizens', starting with laborers and sub-contractors, and the regeneration of Chisso Minamata, which emanated an important influence on regional development, and the further development of related business. At the same rally, based on this petition, a signature movement was executed, which gathered the signatures of over 27,000 people.

On April 12 and 13, 1978, the Mayor of Minamata, the Chairman of the City Council, representatives from each faction of the City Council, and the Chairman and 17 members of the Citizens' Movement, with signatures in hand, filed the petition appealing to the Government and Kumamoto Prefecture for steps to be taken to ensure full relief measures for Minamata disease sufferers; environmental restoration; revitalization of the Minamata and Ashikita areas; and special legislation concerning the regeneration of Chisso.

Formation of the "Citizens' Group"

The quick and comprehensive settlement of Minamata disease issues was a subject of utmost importance for Minamata City, and the zealous hope of all citizens. One of the issues pertaining to Minamata disease was the Minamata disease lawsuit, where repeated deliberations among related parties (excluding the Government) were carried out at the High Court of Fukuoka and other courts. Aside from the trial, a movement seeking relief in the form of direct negotiations with Chisso evolved. However, regardless of these developments, the involvement of the government was indisputably necessary for the quick and comprehensive solution of Minamata disease related issues. Under these circumstances, a sensation developed amongst the citizens, starting with the Minamata City Council, that the revival and regeneration of Minamata would be unachievable without the resolution of Minamata disease issues.

On January 11, 1993, starting with the Mayor of Minamata, the Chairman of the City Council, Diet Member representatives acting as advocators, called for the formation of "(tentative name) The Citizens' Group for the Settlement of Minamata Disease Issues and Support for the Regeneration of the Region". On February 6, a founding general meeting was held for the establishment of "The Citizens' Group for the Settlement of Minamata Disease Issues and Support for the Regeneration of Minamata (abbreviation: Citizens' Group), with 194 organizations and individuals participating, and the Mayor of Minamata being elected as Chairman of the group. The Citizens' Group organized a signature movement to gain supporting signatures for the "Early Settlement of Minamata Disease Issues and Promoting the Regional Development of Minamata", managing to amass the signatures of approximately 25,000 people.

On March 6, the first open public meeting of the Citizens' Group was held in the Minamata Cultural Hall, with the following five major issues being agreed upon.

Greater understanding and active involvement from the government and individuals regarding the quick resolution of Minamata disease issues, and the recognition of Minamata disease issues as issues concerning the whole region. The deepening of the understanding of Minamata disease, and the design of a welfare sympathetic and user-friendly city layout.

Successful conclusion of compensation to Minamata disease sufferers, and the implementation of special supportive measure to Chisso, for the stability of the regional economy and society.

On March 22 and 23, the Group submitted the previous mentioned appeal to the Environment Agency, concerned ministries and agencies, legislators from Kumamoto Prefecture, and all political parties, petitioning for the quick settlement of Minamata Disease issues and support for the regeneration of Minamata. The group also petitioned in the same manner to Kumamoto Prefecture and the Prefectural Assembly.

Since then, from time to time, citizens' meetings are held, and petitions organized in support of Chisso and the rejuvenation of Minamata, as well as for the relief of victims.



Citizens' Meeting on the Early Settlement of Minamata Disease Issues and Hope for the Stronger Continuation of Chisso for Regional Development and Regeneration (June 1993)



Citizens' Meeting on the Early Settlement of Minamata Disease Issues and Promoting the Regional Development and Regeneration (March 1993)



Petitioning National Government